

Snowball Flakes by **Milevens**

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Summary: Nervous about her first school function at the Snowball, Eleven does her best to calm down her nerves. A little encouragement from Joyce goes a long way in soothing her fears.

1. Chapter 1

So much had happened in the last few weeks that it almost seemed impossible that such a *normal* event such as the Snow Ball, would even be a possibility. The ball was supposed to be *fun*. A foreign concept for Eleven, as she quietly pondered the meaning of that word. She never got to have fun when she was a test subject and treated like a dog. In fact, when Mike asked her to go, she wondered what it meant. What it meant to be with someone in a public place and have *fun*.

Standing in front of the rectangular mirror that showed every facet of her appearance, Eleven marveled at what a little lip gloss and blush could do to someone. Back at the lab, she was never allowed to dress up and make herself look pretty. Truth be told, before she met Mike, she never knew what makeup was. According to Mike, it made someone who was already pretty, even prettier. Dustin, in all his wisdom, said that it made someone look "hot." Whatever that word meant.

Pretty. Eleven thought Mike would use that word when he saw her. He seemed to favor it whenever he was around her. Allowing a small smile to spread across her face, she looked down at her flowing dress that used to be Nancy's. The teen seemed to like her enough to loan her something special for the night. Drawn back to the present when a rush of footsteps sounded outside the door, she turned toward the closed door.

When it opened, she was greeted by Joyce, who had come over to help for the night. Eleven liked her. She was the first person, the first woman, who treated her with kindness and respect. Her hugs, while unusual at first, had become something of a comfort to her. Joyce wore a warm smile on her face as she took in her appearance. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears, confusing the child.

"You look...you look beautiful."

Eleven tested the word out in her mind. Beautiful? Beautiful as in-

"Pretty?"

Joyce nodded. "Very pretty, honey."

2. Chapter 2

Eleven was not officially a member of the school she was going to for the ball. From the little she saw of it after she went in to contact Will, it was full of rooms with different meanings and people who made her made. Especially the one who said mean things to Mike. None of that mattered now. What mattered was having fun.

Her dress was on, and her natural hair remained. When she reached for the wig to cover up what she felt insecure about, Joyce gently stopped her. It did not matter what anyone thought of her. What mattered was that she was an accurate depiction of herself. The girl nodded uncertainly.

"Pretty?"

"Pretty," Joyce confirmed. "You don't need a wig to tell you that. The people at school-"

"Mouth-breathers?" That was the word she used to describe anyone, especially those who bothered her friends, who were bad people. Even though it was on the edge of her mind to use that word to describe Papa, there was another word for him that she had not yet found.

Joyce laughed softly. "I suppose so. Your makeup looks pretty, honey."

"Thank you."

The doorbell ringing downstairs, brought her attention away from the ball and to the one who would be taking her. Squaring her shoulders, she breathed heavily the way she always did whenever she was about to be placed in the tank at the lab. When her sensitive ears picked up the sound of the door opening, and Will greeting his friends, her heart leapt from her chest when she heard Mike's excited (but nervous) chatter. All the preparation had led to this moment with her friends.

Eleven was used to feeling all sorts of emotions erupt out of her when

she was used as a test subject, and when she finally took out the monster. When she was nothing but a lab animal, fear and confusion was one of the things she felt. As well as acceptance that she would have to perform in order to earn the praise of Papa. Now that she was in an actual home with people who seemed to like her, she felt bewilderment and also a warmth that circled her heart.

But now-

"Is everything...is everything okay?" Joyce checked, perhaps sensing something was amiss when Eleven paused in the doorway before going downstairs.

Eleven turned back to look at her, unsure what she was feeling. Most of her emotions that she was now getting used to, were brand new. "Why is my heart feeling...jumpy?" Walking down the hall with one step at a time, she took a deep breath.

"Oh, honey," Joyce said, smiling warmly. "You're just feeling nervous. Or you might be excited about seeing Mike."

"Nervous. Ner-vous. Mike." Rounding the hall where Mike and the others were waiting, she looked past Mike's friends, and only focused on him. "Mike."

"Wow," Mike said, swallowing hard. "You look...you look beautiful."

3. Chapter 3

Eleven walked quickly and silently to the car with Mike and his friends. The intense cold from the blizzard, was making her chillier than she admitted. Snuggling closer to Mike in the back, she only vaguely listened to the music playing on the radio. Nancy said it was holiday music, but Eleven had never heard some of the classics now filling her ears.

Mike's hand played with her hair, while his other was curled around her back. Resting her head on his shoulder, she stared out at the small town where she now lived. Most people were walking on the less dangerous sidewalks. Others were simply having fun, and spinning around on the roads. Lifting her head to stare at them, she noted genuine joy on their faces. That was a feeling she got when she was with Mike, but not anytime else.

"What are those people doing?" Eleven asked, pressing her head against the cold glass. It left a mark on the window where rain and snow used to be. Tracing her finger on the window, she created a circle shape.

"They're dancing," Mike explained. "You do that when you're happy, and at a party like this one coming up." "Oh." Eleven did not know how to dance, but she figured it would not be that hard to pick up. "Are we going to?"

Mike nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah! I mean, only if you want to." He ducked his head as though embarrassed he may have said too much.

"Mike, I want to." She only trusted Mike to guide her in a dance.

"That's good. That's awesome!" The car carrying them had to pull around patches of ice that was on the ground, invisible to their eye. Eleven could feel the vibration of the car as it traversed over the slippery stuff. It made her uneasy, like the control of the car would be compromised if the ice sent them off the road. "Ele?" Mike had clearly noticed her nervousness.

"It's okay, Mike." Narrowing her eyes at the sheet of shiny ice that

was on the road in front of her, she expelled only a small amount of energy to shatter the obstacle in front of them. Noticing the hidden black ice, she once again used her considerable power to break it.

"That was...that was cool," Mike said. "Thank you." The rest of the drive passed in a blur of happiness and light for both of them. When they pulled up outside the school, Eleven could not contain her enthusiasm for exploring something new with Mike.

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

The school had been transformed from its dull appearance that Eleven had only seen once, to something that resembled a confecta of colors and shapes that hung from the ceiling. Walking through the front doors with Mike and his friends, it was obvious that she would soon be going through another experience that she had been robbed of growing up. Staring wide-eyed at the bright dresses that adorned the women, and the snazzy outfits that were on the men, she felt modest by comparison. Lightly moving her hand through her hair, she glanced around, already looking for hidden threats.

The school was where she had last defeated the monster, and where she had last seen Mike before she was taken. Although that experience was over and she was back with her family, it never left her mind how lucky she had gotten that she got to come back. Moving forward when Mike gently put his hand on the small of her back, she turned down a hall that looked identical to the ones she had traveled down. The thumping sounds of music and the raucous shouts of laughter could be heard from a set of double doors that were propped open.

Surveying the multitudes of people grinding against one another and leaning against their significant other when they became too drunk to keep themselves upright, Eleven wondered how she would possibly be able to successfully blend in with the others when she already felt like she stuck out like a sore thumb. Almost as though Mike sensed that she was having reservations, he rubbed her back gently, and tossed her an encouraging smile.

"El, is...is everything okay?" His hopefulness was what endeared her to him when there was little hope to go around. "Do you want to-"

"No," Eleven replied, shaking her head. "I'm okay, Mike. I just...I don't know how to...I can't..."

"Can't dance?" Lucas prompted, coming to stand beside them with his girlfriend in tow. She was pretty, and had the confidence that Eleven

lacked. The girl threw her a small smile and waved.

"No. I can't."

"It's easy," Dustin supplied, as the group slowly merged with the energetic crowd. "You just do this." He made a dramatic show of swaying his hips from side-to-side. "Easy peasy."

"Easy," Eleven nodded. "Okay."

Groping for Mike's hand, she found it and squeezed it reassuringly. Stepping through the crowd until she found a clear space that she and Mike could practice her dancing on, she turned to face him, and let him guide her in what to do. Mike softly moved her arms around his neck, and placed his own hands around her waist. Slowly swaying from side to side, she allowed herself to only look at the boy she came with.

Mike's face was one of complete serenity as he moved to the beat of the song that was playing. It was a slow number that had all the kids slowing down for this one song. When she looked at the people around them that were still dancing, she noticed their friends were all with their dates. Even Dustin had managed to convince a girl to go out with him only days before the dance. He looked at her over his girl's shoulder, and gave her a thumbs up sign. She returned the gesture, even though she did not know what it meant.

"So, I, uh," Mike began, clearing his throat nervously. "I sorta got you something."

Eleven's eyes widened. "What did you get me?" She watched as he pulled a small box out of his back pocket. Accepting the gift when he passed it to her, she opened the pale white box with trembling fingers. What she saw was a small necklace with a snow globe as its center. "I love it."

"Do you? I wanted to do something to show-"

"Mike," Eleven interjected, covering his mouth with her hand. "I love it."